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SUBJECT: Madaraka Day Celebrations

¶1. SUMMARY: On June 1 Kenyans celebrated their 46th anniversary of self-rule from the British Empire, with Prime Minister Raila Odinga and President Mwai Kibaki jointly addressing a mixed crowd of supporters. In comparison to previous years a number of things were different about this year's "Madaraka Day," including the absence of Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka. There was an enhanced military parade and cultural entertainment that brought forth Kenya's diversity. Kibaki and Odinga put on a show of unity and in unusually clear terms talked about the need to implement the reform agenda. Most Kenyans, however, remain skeptical of politicians' willingness to implement significant reform measures. End Summary.

¶2. On June 1 Kenyans celebrated their 46th anniversary of self-rule from the British Empire, with Prime Minister Raila Odinga and President Mwai Kibaki jointly addressing a mixed crowd of supporters. In comparison to previous years a number of things were different about this year's "Madaraka Day," including the absence of Vice President Kalonzo Musyoka. There was an expanded military parade and cultural entertainment that brought forth Kenya's diversity. In a departure from two years' ago, the PM spoke and introduced the President. Perhaps conveniently, given the ongoing tussle between the PM and Vice President over leadership of government business and status within the coalition, the VP was in Tripoli representing Kibaki at the Conference of Leaders and Heads of States of CEN-SAD summit, Libya.

¶3. Odinga was well-received, but not as enthusiastically as last year. Odinga spoke in Swahili, and Kibaki spoke in English. Surprisingly, and despite the government having filled a big section of the stands with a paid cheering section, Kibaki's speech was disrupted by a loud disturbance in one section of the stands. The uniformed cheering section tried to drown out the disturbance, and security personnel went after the demonstrators. It took some time for the authorities to shut down the disturbance, but Kibaki soldiered on. He spoke exclusively of the economy, the problems, the launch of the first phase of Vision 2030, and immediate intervention to mitigate the effects of the global downturn (particularly job creation for the youth, which got a rousing series of cheers from the uniformed cheering section, which presumably has already benefitted from this program). He talked about infrastructure development and food security, and will extend the favorable tax concessions for food importers.

¶4. Kibaki focused on both the economy and the reform agenda. He reviewed actions taken by the government to implement the reform agenda, and he said significant strides had been made since the signing of the National Accord. He cited as accomplishments the establishment of the Kriegler Commission, the Constitutional Review Commission, the Waki Commission, and the government's several attempts to establish a local tribunal to prosecute perpetrators of post-election violence. The President talked about the need to end the culture of impunity. Kibaki closed by calling for judicial reform and funding increases for judges, police, and prisons, and he called on the Kenya Anti-Corruption Commission to move quickly to address corruption. He stated that the grand coalition is not in crisis. He and Odinga put on a show of unity.

¶5. Contrary to rumors of possible demonstrations, there was generally a peaceful atmosphere, albeit with a heavy police presence on the approaches to the celebrations venue, the national stadium. The PM and President arrived almost simultaneously and sat next to each other, chatting amiably enough. About half of the Cabinet was in attendance in advance of the President's arrival. His turn

around the stadium was initially greeted by loud cheers from one uniformed cheering section, but the cheers subsided significantly as Kibaki passed the public stands. He inspected the troops, moving at a slow but steady pace across the entire football pitch in the afternoon sun, vibrant and healthy in appearance.

Comment

¶6. Kibaki touched in clear terms on a broad range of issues of concern to Kenyans, particularly the need for reform. He addressed publicly, for what may be the first time, Kenya's "culture of impunity" and the need to combat it. However, most Kenyans remain skeptical about the government's commitment with regard to reform, and they are tiring of politicians who say all the right things but are slow on real action.

RANNEBERGER